

Lesson 3: Beginning a Discipleship Group

Intro

In the last two lessons we learned how Jesus and His Apostles made disciples of others. We also adopted the principles behind this concept and applied them to a discipleship group. In this lesson we will examine deeper the practical application of these principles and identify possible pitfalls we may encounter when beginning a discipleship group. Of course each situation and discipleship group is unique. Nevertheless it is important to follow the principles and advice given.

Principle 1: **Learn as much as possible regarding the concept of a discipleship group!**

Become familiar with the foundational concepts of discipleship groups. First, study the discipleship lessons yourself. Second, talk with others who have more experience. The more you are familiar with and understand discipleship groups, the fewer mistakes you will make.

Principle 2: **Pray for the right group members!**

An important question is “Who do you start a discipleship group with?”. Before you even approach someone, take it to God in prayer and ask Him to place on your heart the people whom you should invite. Your invitation has more weight when you can tell the person: “I have prayed about who I should invite and your name came to mind.” Of course we should not use this as an argument to try to force the person or put them under pressure to join. They always have the freedom and right not to accept your invitation.

While thinking about people whom you can invite, be sure to reflect on their different character qualities. Paul wrote to Timothy: “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2) Search for people who are faithful, dependable, and willing to learn. Many people that come to mind may have been baptized years ago. Others may have just been baptized or have decided to be baptized. In any case faithfulness, willingness to learn, and dependability are indispensable qualities when it comes to discipleship group members.

Explain the concept of discipleship groups to the people you invite and give them the first lesson so that they can get a feel for what it is like. Give them time to pray about your invitation and allow them to decide without being pressured.

Principle 3: **Start small!**

Remember that Jesus started with a small group of people. He devoted a lot of time and energy into His disciples because *He wanted to reach the masses*. When someone is excited about something, they usually want the whole church to jump in and be involved. However they typically experience frustration when they present the concept to the whole church expecting lots of church members to be involved. This is why it is important to start small! The idea of forming discipleship groups must start slowly and spread step by step throughout the church. It is important that you first gain some experience. Thus, begin with a test group! Learn from it! Then invite others and begin a real discipleship group. Keep this running for over a year and then start a new discipleship group or an outreach Bible study group. This way

you can spread the discipleship groups like yeast in a church.

Principle 4: Invite them to an orientation meeting!

Before your first official discipleship group meeting it is important to have an orientation meeting. This is where the steps to a successful discipleship group will be shared.

- In this meeting talk about the goal and the content of the discipleship groups. It is important to cast the vision of what is possible through discipleship groups that multiply.
- Share the principles of discipleship by showing how Jesus and the early Christians lived them out. Tie these principles to the concept of discipleship groups.
- Share your expectations for this group.
- Pass out the materials and memory verse cards for the first lesson .
- Decide a day and time for your weekly meetings.
- Make your verbal or written commitment to the discipleship group. The leader must explain why this commitment is important. Make this a covenant to one another and to God and seal it with prayer.

Principle 5: Plan well the time and order of the discipleship group meetings!

It is necessary to plan around 90 minutes for the discipleship group meeting and to be respectful of maintaining this time frame. The 90 minutes are broken down into the following areas:

- Fellowship (15 Minutes)
- Reciting the Memory verse (5 Minutes)
- Discipleship lesson (45 Minutes)
- Prayer requests and prayer time (20 Minutes)

Each of these elements is important and needs its time. It is also important that the meeting not exceed 90 minutes. We don't want the members to get tired or bored. Remember that they have already spent 1-2 hours preparing for the lesson.

Principle 6: Memorizing Scripture is essential!

Memorizing Bible verses is an essential component of the discipleship group. It is important to help each member successfully memorize each of the texts. Even though the topic is not covered until lesson 5 of Module 1, from day one we should remind the members to memorize each lesson's Bible verses.

Why? Because it encourages commitment, provides motivation, and it is a lot of fun! Normally, 5 minutes should be enough time for people to recite the memory verse. Remember not to give up if everyone hasn't learned the memory verse. As the leader of the group you need to set a good example by learning the text word for word. This will help to motivate the other members of the discipleship group. When someone has not learned or missed several of the memory verses, encourage them to concentrate on the verse at hand. Study lesson 6 from Module 1 (His Word in Us) thoroughly so that this lesson becomes real for you and you can share the principle with conviction.

Principle 7: Prepare well for the lessons!

Discussion is the centerpiece of the discipleship meetings. It is not about going step by step through the entire lesson together. It is assumed that each member has personally studied the lesson beforehand. During the discipleship meetings we want to concentrate more on the important points and share with each other how we can personally apply them to our lives. Here are a couple of good questions that stimulate discussion:

- As you were studying, which points did God personally point out to you?
- In your opinion, what was the most important part of the lesson?

While preparing, the group leader's job is to find important Bible texts in the lesson and formulate good questions that lead to a deeper discussion of the lesson. Of course, the most important aspect is how we personally apply what we have learned from the lesson.

- How can we apply this point in our lives?
- What is God encouraging you to do?
- If we wanted to explain to someone how this lesson spoke to us, how could we do it?

Principle 8: Make the group prayer time a priority!

Group prayer time is an indispensable part of the discipleship group meetings. We pray with and for one another. Most of the time we pray in a row, one after the other until everyone has prayed. But just imagine that Jesus is amongst us and we are speaking with Him. Do you think we would pray one after another until everyone had his or her turn? Surely not! Prayer would start with person A, then persons C and B would pray, maybe person A would add something, then person D, maybe person B, so on and so on. What I mean is that our group prayer time should be more conversational in nature. It could also be like this: We begin with thanksgiving! Everyone who would like to give thanks can. Then comes praise and worship. We thank God that He is so mighty and good! Then we share with God what was important for us in the lesson we discussed and what we want to apply in our lives. We end with requests, whether personal or for others. We bring our requests before God. We pray also for people who do not yet know Christ. Let the prayers be clear, short, and to the point.

Be sure to provide enough time for collecting prayer requests and praying. We don't want to rush the prayer because we ran out of time. It is also very helpful to write out the prayer requests so that everyone can see the list and witness how prayers are answered from one meeting to the next. Another idea is that each member has a small prayer book where they write each week's requests. This way each member can remember the prayer requests during their personal prayer time throughout the week.

Principle 9: Train leaders!

The goal of discipleship is always multiplication. Discipleship groups are not only there for strengthening the personal faith of the members. More than that, the members are to learn how to share their faith and how to start a discipleship group or an outreach Bible study group. Group multiplication only occurs when leaders

have been trained well and are living as disciples of Jesus themselves. Training happens best in the context of the discipleship groups.

In Module 3, the members learn how to ask good questions in order to start discussions about Bible texts. Using this as a starting point, but earlier if possible, other group members should take turns leading out during the meetings. The job of the leader is to gradually step back so that other members can begin to implement what they have learned. The group leader needs to live the motto of John the Baptist: "He must increase, but I must decrease". Little by little the group leader must draw back and give responsibility to the other group members. This is the process by which each group member transitions into being a leader of his or her own discipleship group.

Principle 10: Make outreach a focus of the discipleship group!

Each small group needs a clear vision as to why they exist. When their actions and thoughts only revolve around themselves they will be fruitless. Remember the goal of discipleship groups is to train each group member to lead others in discipleship and to form their own discipleship group or outreach Bible study group. The key word is multiplication. The best context to learn this in is a discipleship group. Discipleship groups form best when they are the product of a previous discipleship group.

The outreach can happen in a variety of ways:

- From the beginning, remind each other that the goal is to start other discipleship courses or outreach Bible study groups.
- At the end of each lesson, group members will be challenged to share with at least one other person the important lesson(s) they learned from each topic. During the next discipleship meeting they can then share their experiences.
- The members intentionally pray for particular people who have not accepted Christ.
- Plans are made on how to reach the people they are praying for. That can simply start by inviting them for a meal, giving a book as a gift, writing a card, or giving them something homemade (e.g., bread, jam, etc.). When the group is earnestly thinking of how to reach these people, God will give them ideas.
- The main goal of Module 3 is training. Members learn how to share their faith, give Bible studies, lead Bible study lessons, and build up an outreach Bible study or discipleship group.
- The members take turns leading out the meetings.
- Members intentionally pray that God will show them who to invite to the discipleship group or outreach Bible study group they are starting. It is also possible that a discipleship group opens up and becomes an outreach Bible study group.

Challenge

1. Continue to pray for people with whom you could establish a discipleship group.
2. Continue to plan specific steps for starting a discipleship group.



Bible Study

Please study **Acts 20:17-38** carefully and take notes on the content, meaning, and life applications of these verses. Be sure to write down good questions for each.

What does the Bible text say?
(content, meaning, application)

How can I ask questions about this?
(Questions on content, meaning, and application)

